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chapter 6

The image shows a stack of three overlapping planning sheets. The top sheet is a grid with the following sections and columns:

- Physical Energy Outlets** (top left)
- Outdoor Explorations** (top right)
- Focused Observations** (middle left)
- Challenging Children's Thinking** (middle right)
- Teacher-led Large Group Activities** (bottom left)
- Teacher-led Small Group Activities** (bottom left, below the large group section)
- Monday**, **Tuesday**, **Wednesday**, **Thursday**, **Friday** (columns)

The grid is currently empty, with an arrow pointing to the right at the bottom of the sheet.

Physical Energy Outlets and Outdoor Explorations

Young children are movers and shakers, wigglers and doers. They have energy to burn and the desire to try out things actively for themselves. They are risk takers, exploring their own capabilities and not always recognizing safety issues.

They are not passive receptors or good listeners. Their primary mode of taking in new information is not by watching demonstrations or listening to lectures. Instead, they are active learners. They are builders and constructors. They are climbers and runners. They are scientists experimenting with new and exciting ways to use materials. They are artists and dancers, exploring their own creativity and freedom in space, figuring out just how to express their unique selves.

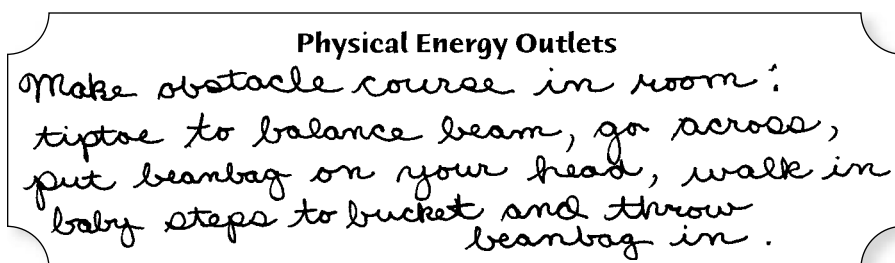
Young children do not express their feelings in words as much as behavior. Their bodies are their primary communication source. Their words and vocabulary have not caught up yet to the range of intense emotions they experience in short periods of time, especially when dealing with a classroom of other children their age.

Teachers in good preschool programs know very well that young children need a number of outlets for their energy and emotional expressions. And they know that a brief recess or outdoor time will not provide enough release to meet children's needs. Therefore, they make sure that the classroom environment provides opportunities for movement, exploration, and hands-on manipulation of objects. They carefully evaluate their daily schedule to make sure that sitting and listening times are briefer than times for hands-on activities.

Physical Energy Outlets

On the Focused Early Learning planning framework is a box labeled "Physical Energy Outlets." Here, each week, teachers identify what specific equipment, materials, opportunities, and activities they will provide in their classroom to help children express themselves physically. These outlets might be already included in the daily choices of learning areas in the classroom. For example, the block and dramatic play areas are often very physical areas. Circle time often includes dancing and movement activities. Highlighting these existing physical activities on the planning framework may be all that is needed some weeks.

Here are some examples of the planning teachers have done for physical energy outlets in their classrooms.



Pam's Plan

Physical Energy Outlets

Use big ball - children stretch and roll over it onto mat.

Vee's Plan

Physical Energy Outlets

Go to gym ? use hoops ? beanbags - throwing, jumping, hopping

Valerie's Plan

Focus on Teaching: Choosing Physical Energy Outlets

Recognizing that more opportunities to expend energy may be necessary for preschool children, many teachers will want to plan for specific physical activities in addition to those embedded in everyday routines. Here are some ideas for equipment, materials, and activities that could be provided as outlets in the classroom. By no means are these lists all-inclusive. What else have you found that helps children burn energy and express themselves physically?

Equipment

- Rocking boat/stair climber
- Large exercise ball
- Indoor climber or a loft
- Crawling tunnel
- Puppet stage and puppets
- Woodworking bench
- Water/sand table

Materials

- Scarves for dancing to music
- Plastic ABC mats (or ABC rug) for walking/jumping/tiptoeing the ABCs
- Plastic bowling set
- Beanbags and target

- Foam balls for playing catch and rolling games
- Balloons (Who can keep theirs from touching the floor? Can you hit it to a friend so he can catch it?)
- Bubbles (Can you stomp them? Can you catch them? Whose went the highest? Whose is the biggest?)

Activities

- Create an obstacle course in the classroom (Tiptoe for five steps, turn around and walk backwards for four steps, crawl under the table, climb over the chair, jump up and down three times, clap your hands, and give me a hug.)
- Paint hands and feet
- Trace our bodies on large pieces of paper and decorate/color them
- Build block structures to act out stories (such as the bridge for “Three Billy Goats Gruff,” the three pigs’ houses, the three bears’ chairs and beds)
- Play “I Spy” (Look around the classroom for something yellow, for circles, for your name.)
- Play group games (such as “Simon Says,” “Doggie, Doggie Who’s Got Your Bone?” “Duck-Duck-Goose,” and “Mother, May I?”)
- Add variations to relay races (Hop like a kangaroo, crawl like a snake, roll like a roly-poly bug, tiptoe, walk backwards, hop on one foot, or even carry water or a plastic egg on a plastic spoon.)
- Play “People Sorting” (The “sorter” asks specific children to come up to the front of the group because they have some visible characteristic in common—all have tie shoes, brown hair, wear glasses, are girls, and so on. The group guesses what the common feature is.)
- Play cooperative games such as “Cows and Ducks,” “Knee to Knee,” “Cooperative Musical Chairs,” or “Help” (*See p. 77 at the end of this chapter for game directions.*)

Much of the equipment, materials, and activities I have listed above have traditionally been seen as “rainy day activities.” I am proposing that we offer such activities on a daily basis, making sure that the children get the opportunity to have physical activity both indoors and out every day. If they have energy to burn, why not provide outlets so that they can settle down more easily when they need to?

Settling Children Down

I am not saying that the classroom should be the equivalent of the outdoor play area. Children also need quiet activities and opportunities to concentrate on tasks that are more cognitive or fine motor in nature. If a teacher provides physical energy outlets in the classroom, he will want to make

sure that he balances those outlets with a quiet reading corner and listening station; soothing art activities such as painting with shaving cream or water colors; cognitively demanding challenges in puzzles and math manipulatives; and soft cuddling opportunities with pets, stuffed animals, and baby dolls. For children who are drawn repeatedly to the physical, teachers will want to help them calm down by perhaps limiting their time on the climbing structure or with bubbles or balloons, and then helping them choose another, more sedentary activity.

Young children do not always balance the use of their own physicality and energy well. We, as adults, must guide them in finding that balance. Providing physical energy outlets and recognizing when a child is ready to move on to a more quiet activity are ways we can maintain reasonable classroom control and still recognize the needs of young children.

Planning Outdoor Explorations

Quality early childhood programs offer outdoor physical activity on a daily basis (weather permitting, of course). Young children's growing bodies are developing muscle control and need to expend energy and to experience fresh air and the delights of nature. Teachers should include recess or outdoor time whenever weather permits.

The framework offers a box for teachers to record their plans for outdoor explorations. Planning and thinking about what outdoor opportunities to provide is truly beneficial to the children. Teachers also may feel that outdoor time is more purposeful and less chaotic.

I am not recommending that the time spent outdoors should be totally teacher-directed. Freedom to run and run until your lungs ache from the fresh, cool air flowing through them is too important for young children. Using muscles in new ways and taking risks in climbing or swinging cannot be "taught." Sitting under a tree and watching the clouds go by through the leaves or observing the ants around their hole is a precious individual moment with nature in which no one, not even a teacher, should intervene.

Here are some examples of teachers' plans for outdoor explorations using the framework.

Mary: *"Having a space for physical energy outlets is a good way to emphasize the importance of that in an early childhood classroom and helps me focus on that as well. I'm consciously trying to build in those outlets throughout the day."*

Vicki: *"This section made me think about physical activity that is not just outside. Sometimes, we would plan to do the 'Hokey Pokey' or bounce a ball inside. I could see this would be very important for a full-day classroom. And, next year, my class will be mostly young three-year-olds. I can see that physical energy outlets will be really important for them!"*

Valerie: *"I do sensorimotor skills regularly with my children and incorporated those into the physical energy outlets. Last year, I could do them right in the classroom. This year I'll have to go to the gym, or to the hallway downstairs, because my new classroom is very small."*

Pam: “My physical energy outlets tend to be more spontaneous than planned, so I don’t always write something down in this part of the framework. For example, if we read a story about animals, then the transition from that story to centers will be to move like your favorite animal. I do use this as a plan for bad weather when we can’t go outside. Then, I’ll set up the bowling set or create an indoor obstacle course.”

Outdoor Explorations

Take parachute outdoors.

Pam’s Plan

Outdoor Explorations

Look for leaves, collect seeds and insects as well.

Linde’s Plan

Outdoor Explorations

Take paint easels out. Take blanket & basket of books for Reading

Gayle’s Plan

Focus on Teaching: Changing Possibilities Outdoors

Planning for changing possibilities outdoors can enrich the experiences inherent at recess time. Introducing new equipment, materials, or activities can make every outdoor time an adventure. With changing possibilities, children may try more new things or stay interested longer. Teachers are providing a sense of some structure to a time that is ripe with freedom for exploration and physical expression.

Here are some ideas for equipment, materials, and activities that can be added to the outdoor area and recorded on the planning framework. The assumption underlying all of the lists is that most programs’ outdoor areas minimally contain some running space and climbing equipment. Again, by no means are these suggestions all-inclusive. What else has worked successfully for you?

Equipment

- Bikes, wagons, or carts
- Climbing tunnel
- Large exercise ball
- Balls in different sizes, targets
- Woodworking bench
- Sand/water table
- Gardening tools

Materials

- Streamers or scarves for feeling/seeing the wind at work
- Bubbles
- Spray bottles filled with water for painting the pavement or walls
- Paintbrushes and buckets of water for painting
- Magnifying glasses and books about insects
- Sidewalk chalk
- Small cars and trucks for the sandbox
- Jump ropes
- Plastic-can stilts
- Hoops of various sizes
- Binoculars for watching birds or clouds
- Tape recorder for taping bird songs or outdoor noises
- Dress-up clothes for dramatic play (Avoid long skirts and high-heel shoes.)

Activities

- Read under a tree (Sit on a blanket or plastic mat.)
- Wash the baby dolls or dishes in the water table
- Wash the classroom chairs and tables
- Paint outdoors; use the easel
- Carefully observe ice cubes as they melt
- Adopt a tree; check on it regularly in each season
- Go on a nature scavenger hunt: collect leaves (different colors, shapes), nuts, rocks, and feathers
- Count and categorize the trucks that drive by (How many cement trucks? Dump trucks? Tow trucks?)
- Do texture rubbings with crayon; use paper, pavement, cement, fence, wall, slide, and so on
- Organize a driver's license bureau for all bike riders; have "police officers" enforce traffic rules, check licenses, and give tickets

- Do an obstacle course: climb up the slide and go down the slide, run over to the sandbox, walk around the edge, jump through the hoop, and give me a hug
- Organize group games: “Red Light, Green Light,” “Duck-Duck-Goose,” “Mother, May I?”
- Run relay races; add variations such as running, jumping, walking like various animals
- Play catch and rolling games
- Have a picnic—eat snack outside!

The possibilities are endless, aren't they? The goal, however, is the same: children running, jumping, climbing, hiding, swinging, digging, and taking advantage of the basic equipment, space, and freedom in the outdoor area. The suggested equipment, materials, and activities listed above are offered in addition to the basic setup.

Thinking about and planning for physical energy outlets in the classroom is an important task that will enhance an early childhood classroom. Even with the most careful plans, flexibility and responsiveness are necessary as well. How many times have teachers talked about how “squirrelly” their children were today? Or, asked, “Is it a full moon? My kids sure are acting crazy!” Identifying some ways to provide outlets for physical energy each week, and being prepared to offer spontaneous physical activities when needed, will make preschool and kindergarten teachers' jobs much easier and successful in the long run. By doing so, teachers are recognizing and celebrating the essence of young children, rather than working against their very natures.

Pam: *“Including outdoor explorations on the framework made me think, and made me feel guilty, about bringing materials outside and planning more for outdoor time rather than just letting it happen.”*

Reflecting on Physical Energy Outlets and Outdoor Explorations

Remember to reflect on how well both of these areas are going when engaging in the reflection process. Are the physical energy outlets this week feeling out of control? Maybe more adult supervision for that area was needed. Or, perhaps fewer children should participate at one time. Did any children wander outdoors or appear to not engage in any one activity? Maybe it's time to bring out something from indoors. Many teachers find that bringing out an easel and paints, or the water table and babies to wash, can spark interest in the children who are not interested in the usual climbing and swinging equipment.

Here are some examples of teachers' reflections about these active areas and the plans they made in response.

Physical Energy Outlets

BALLOON CATCH GOT OUT OF CONTROL -
HARD FOR MARNI + I TO SUPERVISE.

Luis' Reflection

Physical Energy Outlets

SET UP PLASTIC BOWLING SET - MARNI GIVE
INSTRUCTIONS TO THOSE BOWLING. THEN FLOAT
AROUND CLASSROOM KEEPING AN EYE ON
BOWLERS.

Luis' Plan

Outdoor Explorations

Last week "exploring ways our body
can move" was too vague. Kids
didn't know what to do.

Vee's Reflection

Outdoor Explorations

How many different ways can
you move like an animal?
Animal relay races.

Vee's Plan

How to Play the Cooperative Games

I learned these games attending a variety of workshops on cooperative games over the years. The goal is that everyone wins—there are no losers. Some open space is needed for each game.

Cows and Ducks

Tell the children that they must decide inside their mind what kind of animal they are going to be—either a cow or a duck. The only way anyone will know

which animal they are is by the sound they will make. Once they start making the sound, they need to find all of the other children who are making the same sound as their animal and get together in a group. “Ready, set, go!” Once the two groups have formed, have them line up facing each other and analyze their size by counting, comparing lengths, or whatever. The game can be played again and again with the same animals, or with other animal pairs that will make for interesting and fun sounds and organizing in groups. Let the children suggest such pairs!

Knee to Knee

Each child has a partner. The caller (begin with the teacher, then have children take turns) announces a body part in this fashion, “Knee to knee.” Each pair of children must stand knee to knee. Try elbows, shoulders, pinky fingers, backs, and so on.

Cooperative Musical Chairs

This game is played as traditional musical chairs is played, except no one is ever out. Instead, any child that does not have a seat, poses it as a problem for the whole group to solve. “How can we help ‘so-and-so’ to be able to sit somewhere?” Let the children offer to share chairs or have someone sit on their lap or sit next to them. Be prepared for lots of giggles!

Help

This is my favorite indoor cooperative game. It really settles children down and helps them to be more sensitive to others’ needs. It can go on for quite a long time with some groups.

You will need tissues such as Kleenex separated to one thickness. Each child gets a tissue, which is then carefully placed on each child’s head. Each child may walk around the room as long as the tissue is in place on her head (no holding on allowed!). If the tissue falls off, the child is frozen, and cannot move until a friend is kind enough to gently place the tissue back on top of the head. Then, the child who was frozen can move again. If the tissue falls off the child who was helping, that child is also frozen until someone comes and helps. The children may not call out for help; instead, their friends have to pay close attention and be ready to help any friend in need.